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Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of political affairs: special political missions**

Summary

At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an in-depth evaluation of political affairs. The first report on subprogramme 1 on prevention, control and resolution of conflicts was presented to the Committee at its forty-sixth session in 2006. The present report is part of phase two of the in-depth evaluation. It covers special political missions led and administered by the Department of Political Affairs, which is the lead United Nations department for preventive diplomacy and peacemaking and the focal point for mediation within the United Nations system.

Since 1990, there has been a sixfold increase in United Nations preventive diplomacy missions, a fourfold increase in United Nations peace operations, and an elevenfold increase in the number of States subject to United Nations sanctions. The report assesses two categories of special political missions: expert groups and special envoys and advisers (envoys) of the Secretary-General. Expert groups are independent mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on sanctions violations and recommending measures for strengthening compliance; envoys represent the Secretary-General in conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution.

* E/AC.51/2007/1 and Corr.1.

** The delay in submission was caused by the time taken to evaluate and incorporate the comments received from the relevant stakeholders on the report's findings and recommendations.

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The evaluation found that both expert groups and envoys have clear mandates and make a valuable contribution to the maintenance of peace and security. However, strengthening of work processes, partnerships in the field, management and administrative support systems would enhance their effectiveness. OIOS therefore recommends that the Department and the Secretary-General:

- Further strengthen and document methodological standards and expert group reporting guidelines in consultation with the Office of Legal Affairs and expert groups
- Work to clarify appropriate terms and conditions under which expert groups can be recruited with the Office of Human Resources Management and the Office of Legal Affairs
- Initiate a strategic review of envoys
- Strengthen management and support systems for expert groups and envoys
- Enhance coordination between expert groups, envoys and United Nations field agencies with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Development Group
- Develop expert group and envoy knowledge management systems
- Increase the number of female expert group members
- Give serious attention to appointing female envoys

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–3	4
II.	Methodology	4–5	5
III.	Background	6–13	6
IV.	Evaluation findings	14–53	9
	Group 1: expert groups	14–33	9
	A. Expert group mandates are generally agreed to be clear and relevant, although time and budget constraints may hinder their full implementation	14–16	9
	B. There is wide consensus among Member States, expert group members and other United Nations entities that, given the constraints under which they operate, expert groups make a valuable contribution to United Nations sanctions regimes	17–20	9
	C. Strengthening expert group work processes and partnerships would further enhance their effectiveness	21–25	10
	D. Despite committed support by the Department, some management and other support procedures mitigate against optimal expert group effectiveness	26–33	12
	Group 2: envoys	34–53	14
	A. In general, envoy mandates clearly define mission objectives, while allowing flexibility of interpretation on how these objectives are best achieved	34–36	14
	B. While none of the missions studied has fully achieved its mandated objectives, the envoys' role is widely valued	37–40	15
	C. Strengthening envoy mission capacity and enhancing coordination with the United Nations system in the field would facilitate further progress	41–43	16
	D. Management and other support systems for envoys are inadequate and do not ensure transparency and accountability	44–53	17
V.	Conclusion	54–55	20
VI.	Recommendations	56–62	20

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an in-depth evaluation of political affairs.[1] The political affairs programme is implemented by the Department of Political Affairs. It is divided into the following five subprogrammes:

- Subprogramme 1, Prevention, control and resolution of conflict, implemented by four regional divisions (Africa I, Africa II, Americas and Europe, and Asia and the Pacific)
- Subprogramme 2, Electoral assistance, implemented by the Electoral Assistance Division
- Subprogramme 3, Security Council affairs, implemented by the Security Council Affairs Division
- Subprogramme 4, Decolonization, implemented by the Decolonization Unit
- Subprogramme 5, Question of Palestine, implemented by the Division for Palestinian Rights

In addition, the Department provides executive direction for the political and substantive activities of special political missions, which are funded under section 3B of the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 (A/60/6 (sect. 3)).

2. OIOS presented a report on subprogramme 1 to the Committee at its forty-sixth session in 2006. OIOS is presenting reports on the remaining four subprogrammes, a summary report and a report on special political missions led and administered by the Department of Political Affairs to the Committee at its forty-seventh session in 2007. The present report covers the special political missions. It has been reviewed by the relevant department and their comments appear in italics as appropriate.

3. The purpose of this in-depth evaluation is to assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the current special political missions, including an assessment of the Department's management of them. It focuses on two special political mission categories: expert groups and special envoys and advisers of the Secretary-General (envoys) (see table 1).[2] Within group 2, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Myanmar and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Africa are not included in the present evaluation.[3]

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[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/59/16), para 382, and General Assembly resolution 59/275, para. 22.

[2] These groups were categorized by OIOS in its report on the audit of the management of special political missions by the Department of Political Affairs (see A/61/357).

[3] The Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Africa will be examined in the context of the upcoming in-depth evaluation of United Nations support for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and Africa pursuant to General Assembly resolution 61/235. An initial OIOS evaluability assessment of the Special Envoy for Myanmar concluded that an evaluation at this time was not feasible.

Table 1
Categorization of special political missions

Group 1: expert groups	*Group 2: special envoys and advisers of the Secretary-General*
1. Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (Security Council resolution 1526 (2004)) concerning Al-Qaeda and the Taliban	1. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Myanmar
2. Monitoring Group on Somalia	2. Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Africa
3. Panel of Experts on Liberia	3. Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Cyprus
4. Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo	4. Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide
5. Panel of Experts concerning the Sudan	5. Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara
6. Group of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire	6. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

II. Methodology

4. In conducting the evaluation, OIOS utilized a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods, including self-administered surveys, observation, in-depth interviews in person and/or by telephone, programme data analyses and literature review. The evaluation findings are based on the following 10 data sources: (a) a self-administered survey of all current expert group members;[4] (b) a self-administered survey of resident coordinators in countries where Security Council sanctions apply or neighbouring countries affected by these sanctions;[5] (c) 18 interviews with Department management and staff; (d) 5 interviews with Secretariat partners; (e) 12 interviews with Special Political Mission envoys, experts and peacekeeping mission staff; (f) 12 interviews with Member States representatives; (g) 5 interviews with representatives from other United Nations entities; (h) 5 interviews with external stakeholders;[6] (i) a literature review, including previous internal and external audits and assessments; and (j) observation of a sanctions committee meeting and an expert group team meeting. Data from the

[4] The survey was conducted from December 2006 to January 2007. Out of 31 expert group members surveyed, 10 responded, for a response rate of 32 per cent. This will be referred to as the "expert group survey" in the report.

[5] The survey was conducted in January 2007. Out of 18 resident coordinators surveyed, 6 responded, for a response rate of 33 per cent. This will be referred to as the "resident coordinator survey" in the report.

[6] Stakeholders include non-governmental organization staff and academics.

Expert groups

9. Since 1999, and as sanctions have become more targeted, sanctions committees have increasingly used independent expert groups to monitor and report on sanctions violations and recommend measures to strengthen compliance by targeted and neighbouring States.[10] Expert groups are appointed by the Secretary-General at the request of the Security Council and report to the relevant sanctions committees.

Envoys

10. Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations gives the Secretary-General wide latitude to bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which, in his opinion, may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. Envoys represent the Secretary-General and are an extension of his political and diplomatic role in the prevention, mediation, and resolution of conflict. They have regional, country, or thematic mandates. The role of envoys was greatly expanded under the former Secretary-General, both numerically and in terms of their focus.

11. The Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Cyprus and the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara were first mandated 43 and 10 years ago, respectively, and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) and the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide were first mandated in 2004. Most envoys (including all four reviewed here) are retained on a when actually employed basis.[11]

Expert group and envoy growth trends

12. As illustrated in figure I, between 1996 and 2006 the number of expert groups increased from 2 to 6, and envoys increased from 4 to 16 between 1996-2005, falling to 6 in 2006-2007 with the completion of 10 missions.[12] There are currently 6 envoys. Despite the significant increase of special political missions over the last 15 years, there has not been a concomitant increase in resources for backstopping and oversight by Headquarters.

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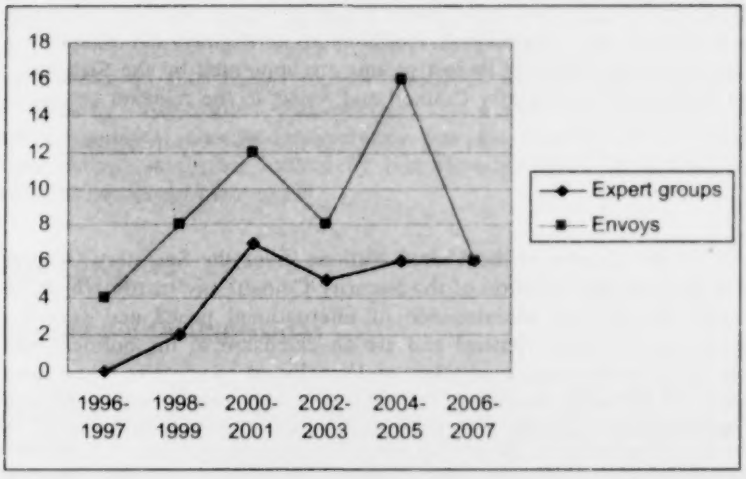
[10] Targeted sanctions focus on individuals, groups, and entities as well as States. The first expert group was established by Security Council resolution 1237 (1999) to report on sanctions violations in Angola.

[11] This designation means that they are engaged for short or intermittent periods for a single or series of assignments within a given time frame.

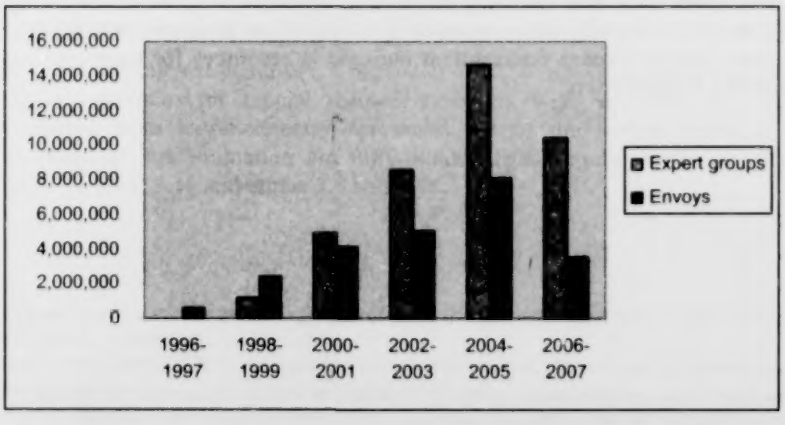
[12] Department of Political Affairs figures.

Figure I
Growth in number of expert groups and envoys, 1996-2006



13. As shown in figure II, the combined budget of expert groups and envoys increased from $610,000 in 1996-1997 to $14 million in 2006-2007. These two categories represent 5-7 per cent of special political mission budgets in a given biennium. The tenfold increase in expert group budgets between 1996-2007 reflects longer, continuous mandate periods rather than a proportionate rise in the number or size of expert groups.

Figure II
Growth in expert group and envoy budgets, 1996-2006
(United States dollars)



IV. Evaluation findings

Group 1: expert groups

A. Expert group mandates are generally agreed to be clear and relevant, although time and budget constraints may hinder their full implementation

14. Most expert group members surveyed and Member State and Secretariat staff interviewed agree expert group mandates are clear and relevant. Most expert group survey respondents (70 per cent) indicated that their current mandates clearly spell out Security Council expectations, and nearly all (90 per cent) state they clearly delineate specific areas of work. Fewer expert group survey respondents (60 per cent) believe their mandates accurately reflect the context of the sanctions regime within which they work. Expert group mandates reflect the evolving nature of sanctions. Universally, expert group mandates include monitoring and documenting sanction violations; four mandates include working with Governments to build capacity for improved compliance with sanctions measures; and in the case of Liberia, the expert group is also mandated to assess progress made towards [meeting conditions for lifting of the sanctions] ... and to assess [the] humanitarian and socio-economic impact of measures. (See Security Council resolution 1521 (2003), para. 22.)

15. Time frames for individual expert group mandates have been steadily increasing.[13] These mandates have typically been for six months, although they can range from 5 weeks to 18 months. However, the administrative delays in establishing groups and the requirement for final reports to be submitted five weeks before the end of the mandate translates into less than half that time available for field work. Ninety per cent of expert group respondents report spending 20 per cent or less of their time on evidence gathering, fact-finding and investigating.

16. Most expert group survey respondents (70 per cent) believe their budgets do not adequately reflect the costs of achieving mandated objectives in an effective and timely manner. By necessity, expert groups must prioritize their mandated activities, even though capacity is augmented by the Department's political affairs officers and consultants. Additionally, the size of the groups is small compared with both the geographic area being monitored and the large scope of expert group mandates. One third of expert group survey respondents says that the feasibility of implementing their mandate is very poor or poor.

B. There is wide consensus among Member States, expert group members and other United Nations entities that, given the constraints under which they operate, expert groups make a valuable contribution to United Nations sanctions regimes

17. There is a high degree of convergence among expert group members, Member States and Secretariat staff that expert groups are an appropriate mechanism with which to monitor sanctions regimes. While it is difficult to quantify expert group contributions to sanctions regimes, most agree that the existence of expert groups, their reports, and their engagement with Governments play a valuable role in

[13] The mandate for the Liberia expert group was initially for five weeks but is currently for six months. Mandates for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan expert groups have recently been extended for 12 months rather than 6 months as in previous extensions.

monitoring compliance, as well as keeping international attention focused on sanctions.

18. In carrying out this function, expert groups' primary role is to document sanctions violations and to provide accurate and timely technical reports to the Security Council through the sanctions committees. While not all recommendations are taken up, Member States consider expert group reports a valued source of information, albeit just one, on which the Security Council relies to adjust sanctions regimes.[14] Most Member States interviewed consider that expert groups do extremely difficult work under difficult conditions and that, overall, the information in their reports is very good. Expert group survey respondents assessed themselves as most effective in the areas of drafting reports, presenting key findings to the sanctions committees and fielding Security Council questions; all expert group survey respondents believe they are very effective in delivering practical results in a short period of time, meeting deadlines and providing accurate information.

19. As sanctions have evolved, expert groups have contributed conceptually to their changing use, which has in turn contributed to a growing consensus among Member States about the effectiveness of targeted sanctions. The inclusion of experts to monitor the humanitarian impact of sanctions has also contributed to the body of knowledge on this topic.

20. There have been other positive consequences, even if unintended, of expert group work. Expert groups have been credited by peacekeeping mission staff with reducing the arms flow in certain countries. Also, individual sanctions violators named in some expert group reports have been arrested and experts are requested to testify in their prosecutions. It is generally noted, however, that the effectiveness of sanctions regimes is as dependent on the international community's actions as on the work of the expert groups.

C. Strengthening expert group work processes and partnerships would further enhance their effectiveness

21. Expert group working practices have developed in an ad hoc manner, with no formalized common standards on gathering evidence. The Office of Legal Affairs, which briefs expert groups on evidentiary standards, emphasized that expert group reports, while not legal documents, should be of a sufficiently high standard to be used as evidence in legal cases. On occasion, Member States have questioned the rigour of the evidentiary standards used by expert groups, undermining the credibility of reports and increasing the vulnerability of the United Nations and expert groups to legal challenges.[15] As noted in paragraph 20 of the report of the Informal Working Group of the Security Council on General Issues of Sanctions (see S/2006/997, annex)

> "Common methodological standards, allowing for different mandates and drawing on the best practices and lessons learned from the accumulated experience of past and present sanctions monitoring mechanisms, could

[14] Alex Vines, "Monitoring UN sanctions in Africa: the role of panels of experts," in Trevor Findlay, ed., *Verification Yearbook, 2003*, Verification Research, Training and Information Centre, London.

[15] There have been legal challenges by individuals and companies to information published in reports of various expert groups. See Alex Vines, op. cit.

provide a useful reference point for such mechanisms for identifying and verifying sanctions violations and for evaluating the reliability of sources."[16]

The report outlines possible steps for clarifying methodological standards but does not actually specify in any detail what these standards should entail. The newly updated Department expert group Handbook (27 December 2006) indicates that the initial expert group briefing will contain guidance on methodology and approaches.[17] While these publications represent a positive step towards standardizing expert group methodology, OIOS believes that further work to develop and document comprehensive, consistent and detailed methodological standards for expert group reports would further improve their effectiveness.

22. Department staff read expert group reports and comment on issues related to protocol, political issues, evidentiary standards and fact-checking, before they are submitted to the respective sanctions committee. Given their independence, however, expert groups maintain responsibility for the substance of their reports. While this independence cannot be compromised, common guidelines which are sufficiently flexible to accommodate different expert group mandates would ensure that all reports meet the necessary standards and that the information they contain is more easily comparable.

23. The quality of relationships formed with national Governments, United Nations entities and other external partners fundamentally affects expert group access to information. Expert group key relationships are with Governments in their countries of operation. For these to be effective, Member State cooperation is required.[18] Some Department staff are of the opinion that Security Council resolutions could be more explicit in encouraging Member States, and through them commercial enterprises operating on their territory, to offer full support to expert groups.

24. The complementarity of peacekeeping and expert group mandates with regard to monitoring sanctions provides the opportunity for mutually supportive relationships.[19] Peacekeeping operations can provide logistical support and facilitate initial contact with expert group interlocutors, while experts are mandated to share information to assist peacekeeping missions in their monitoring activities.[20] They can reinforce each other's messages to Governments. Several peacekeeping mission staff interviewed report that, in the past, personality issues have resulted in a reluctance by some expert groups to share information with peacekeeping missions, despite their mandates. Specific guidance from the Department for expert groups to share information with peacekeepers as appropriate can counter these obstacles.

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[16] The report has been distributed to all expert groups.

[17] *Handbook for members of Panels/Groups of Experts and Monitoring Groups/Mechanisms/Teams established by the Security Council to monitor compliance with sanctions regimes*, para 35.

[18] Sixty per cent of expert group survey respondents report frequent or routine contact with Member State delegations in targeted countries and neighbouring States.

[19] See Security Council resolution 1533 (2004), para. 10 (a), mandating the Democratic Republic of the Congo expert group "to examine and analyse information gathered by MONUC in the context of its monitoring mandate".

[20] Sharing logistics such as flights over areas to be monitored also contributes to budget efficiencies. Staff in one peacekeeping mission say they appreciated the expert group sharing their detailed, high-quality monitoring information and timing their report submission to assist the mission with its work.

25. According to Headquarters staff of the Department and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNDP provides logistical support for expert groups where there is no peacekeeping mission. However, all respondents to the resident coordinators survey report being unaware of the expert groups' work.

D. Despite committed support by the Department, some management and other support procedures mitigate against optimal expert group effectiveness

26. Expert groups are substantively supported by the Security Council Subsidiary Organs Branch within the Security Council Affairs Division and, primarily, administratively supported by the Department's Executive Office. OIOS notes that despite the increase in numbers of expert groups, however, there has been no corresponding increase in Department resources for their administration and support.

27. Several administrative procedures hinder expert group work.[21] Issues identified by experts include re-contracting delays between mandates, slow travel authorization and insufficient pages in their Travel Certificates, leaving them with no official documentation and compromising their security. Expert groups need flexible and time-responsive administrative systems to facilitate their speedy recruitment and contracting as well as to enable them to respond to information leads at short notice.

28. Additionally, experts are recruited under consultant (special service agreement) contracts; experts consider some of the terms and conditions incompatible with what they are required to do. Consultants are not provided with medical or any other form of insurance nor are they able to secure alternative arrangements given the potentially dangerous nature of their mandated activities; and in general they are not eligible for any paid leave, despite serving in some cases over two years.[22] The Department's Executive Office also comments that resolving these incompatibilities would make their job of providing administrative support easier and they welcome any initiative by the Office of Human Resources Management to resolve this. Despite several meetings between the Office of Human Resources Management, the Executive Office and the Office of Legal Affairs to address these anomalies, they remain unresolved. OIOS notes that these issues should be taken up by the Office of Human Resources Management as an important priority.

29. There is a debate among experts, Member States and Secretariat staff regarding the relative merits of rotating experts off and between expert groups to maintain a fresh approach, versus retaining experts in one expert group to maximize experience and institutional memory.[23] The most common recommendation in expert group reports is for their mandates to be extended, in some cases with a request to extend the mandate of the current members, guaranteeing their

[21] Fifty per cent of experts surveyed cited shortcomings in the level of administrative support and coordination provided by the Secretariat as a key challenge in implementing their mandates.

[22] See OIOS report on the audits of recruitment of experts for sanctions panels in the Department of Political Affairs (AP2005/560/03), paras. 24-25. Although the Department's Executive Office recently negotiated with the Office of Human Resources Management for authorized paid breaks for one expert group, the incompatibility of some of the consultant terms and conditions for expert group functioning still apply.

[23] Forty-two per cent of expert group survey respondents have served 30 months or more.

re-contracting. This debate is complicated by the "24/36 rule", which restricts the continuous contracting of consultants for 24 months in a 36-month period. Despite this restriction, waivers have been obtained and a number of expert group members have served for longer than 24 months continuously within the 36-month period. A decision on whether rotation is beneficial to expert group effectiveness, and a corresponding clarification of the 24/36 rule, would eliminate the current uncertainty.

30. Expert group effectiveness would be further enhanced by systems ensuring competency-based recruitment. Optimal expert group functioning requires highly developed technical skills, especially in the conduct of investigations, as well as report writing, regional familiarity and language skills. It also requires the ability to build constructive relationships, primarily with other team members but also with Governments, other United Nations bodies and potential information sources.[24] In addition to competency-based recruitment, given the United Nations commitment to gender equality, continued efforts to improve the ratio between female and male experts are required (see S/2005/636). Of the 32 experts, only 3 are women.

31. Given the potential legal and human rights implications of their work and lack of directly comparable sanctions monitoring teams in existence, the initial briefing given to newly mandated experts on their legal status, coordination with United Nations bodies on the ground, relationship with the Security Council and Secretary-General, administrative and personnel issues and methodological standards is important.[25] Currently this briefing is verbal (increasing the potential for misunderstandings) and, according to some experts, not always adequate or timely.[26] As a result, experts may be unaware of the full legal ramifications of their work. The Office of Legal Affairs staff report that some experts appear unaware of the ongoing legal support the Office offers for the duration of the mandate.

32. The absence of a mechanism for systematically capturing lessons learned or creating institutional memory for expert groups represents a significant resource loss for the groups, the Secretariat and Member States (see A/61/357, para. 26, and S/2006/997, para. 12). While some expert groups have developed databases or spreadsheets for their own use, information-sharing among expert groups is limited.[27] Unexploited potential also exists for experts covering the same technical areas to work together and share information across national borders. Instituting routine debriefings would capture valuable information and ensure continuity between rotating experts.

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[24] Both experts and Department staff highlight the need for a close working relationship among team members as important for group effectiveness. Expert group cohesion has not been helped by widely varying remuneration levels within teams.

[25] By the Department of Political Affairs, the Office of Human Resources Management, the Office of Legal Affairs.

[26] One expert reports that his first briefing occurred 18 months after he started working and that consultants joining groups already in the field are not always briefed. Sixty per cent of experts surveyed felt that the initial briefing should include a more comprehensive introduction to the United Nations and over a third considered that briefings at the start of subsequent mandates need to be updated to remain relevant.

[27] The Al-Qaida/Taliban expert group has a database and the Security Council Affairs Division focal point for Somalia and the Sudan expert group has developed spreadsheets. However, most expert group survey respondents (80 per cent) report spending less than 5 per cent of their time exchanging relevant knowledge with other expert groups.

33. In recognition of this gap, there is a proposal for the development of an expert group information management system.[28] Any proposal accepted should ensure adequate financial and technical resources within the Department to maintain the system and maximize its use for the benefit of expert groups, Member States and the Secretariat. The proposed guidelines on evidentiary standards (see paras. 21-22 above) will contribute to ensuring the quality of information, and mandates will need to include a requirement for all information gathered to be inputted and for systematic debriefing of experts to capture lessons learned. One recent positive development is that beginning in 2007, five additional days for two experts per group will be allotted to archive expert group material.

Group 2: envoys

A. In general, envoy mandates clearly define mission objectives, while allowing flexibility of interpretation on how these objectives are best achieved

34. Department staff, Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General of the Department and the Secretary-General himself undertake good offices missions. Only when the Secretary-General considers that the situation is ripe for Track One diplomacy does he appoint envoys.[29] Any consideration of envoy missions' effectiveness must bear in mind the broader environment of other actors' contributions. All four envoy mandates reviewed for the present evaluation establish mission objectives clearly. Despite regular renewal (and occasional expansion by Security Council resolutions), however, they may not always continue to reflect the reality of changing situations on the ground.

35. Envoys have considerable flexibility to interpret their good offices' mandates according to their personal styles, understanding of the situation, and the capacity of their mission. This is perceived by envoys and Member States as positive. While such flexibility allows adaptation to changing circumstances, for some missions this interpretation has caused friction with some parties to the situation. Department staff also comment that mandate flexibility can be used by some parties to hinder progress towards a settlement.

36. Multiple special political mission mandates in one region offer potential opportunities for synergies between different envoys, but, they can also cause confusion. The most complex example of this is in the Middle East. Member States, envoys, Department and other United Nations staff interviewed believe there to be considerable overlap and potential for rationalization of special political missions in

[28] OIOS notes that issues concerning who should be given access to the information and how to deal with classified material should be considered before the proposal is accepted.

[29] Track One diplomacy refers to Government-to-Government diplomatic efforts; Track Two, also known as citizen diplomacy, brings civil society actors from both sides together. Track Two diplomacy can be used to support Track One objectives. See John W. McDonald, "Further Exploration of Track Two Diplomacy", in *Timing the De-Escalation of International Conflicts*, Louis Kriesberg & Stuart J. Thorson, ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

this region.[30] While envoys can exploit this overlap for greater effectiveness, it has also been observed that the presence of multiple missions and mandates can cause tensions between them — and confusion to local parties trying to understand the relationship between different United Nations bodies.

B. While none of the missions studied has fully achieved its mandated objectives, the envoys' role is widely valued

37. Despite a crowded mediation market and the longevity of some unresolved international disputes, the good offices role played by envoys is generally considered to be an appropriate mechanism by which the Secretary-General can address issues of international concern. Member States, the Department and other United Nations staff and external stakeholders all concur with this view. Nevertheless, they also note that the success of envoy missions is contingent upon different parties' expectations and agendas.

38. At the same time it is recognized that the practice of appointing envoys and establishing special political missions has increasingly been used to address a number of wide-ranging objectives. This increasingly broad interpretation of the special political mission mechanism warrants review and possible rationalization. One Member State observes that the proliferation of envoys to address different issues has resulted in the perception that the special political mission budget is being used to fund activities which are not directly related to mediation, and a United Nations staff member considers that the appointment of envoys is better reserved for senior mediation capacity for specific interventions rather than being used to raise the profile of issues such as genocide.

39. The two most important factors identified by all respondent groups that contribute to successful envoy missions are: (a) the personal qualities, skills, experience and perceived impartiality of the envoy; and (b) the political will of Member States. Personal style and competencies, including diplomatic skill, personal networks, a good understanding of the political context, and cultural sensitivity are considered pivotal. Extensive personal networks facilitate speedy access to information and analysis, and enable envoys to mobilize political will through external partners. Envoys with previous United Nations experience are perceived to be at an advantage in terms of knowing the system and whom to turn to for support. The perception of impartiality is also considered critical — envoys need to be seen as equally distant from all parties in order to retain credibility throughout the negotiation process. Envoys can only operate productively when they have the continued buy-in of the parties directly involved. Where this support has been withdrawn, for whatever reason, it becomes increasingly difficult to make progress.

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[30] In February 2007, the role of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Lebanon was expanded to the Special Coordinator of the Secretary-General for Lebanon, based in Beirut and with responsibility for "coordinating the work of the United Nations and representing [the Secretary-General] on all political aspects of the United Nations work there [in Lebanon]" (see S/2007/85). This appointment brings the number to three envoys with political responsibility for Lebanon including the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) and the Special Adviser on the Situation in the Middle East, based in the Department of Political Affairs, who provides comprehensive analysis and policy options to the Secretary-General and supports his good offices and mediation efforts in the Middle East. It is not clear from the mandates what the relationship between these envoys should be.

40. For any political settlement to be reached, the political will of the interested parties, the Secretary-General and the Security Council is imperative. While situations have to be ripe for progress to be made, envoys, as skilled diplomats, can create opportunities within the wider political context to move situations forward, and mobilize political will through external partners. Where "Friends of the Secretary-General" exist or are instituted, this leverage is also considered to be a useful resource for the envoy.[31]

C. Strengthening envoy mission capacity and enhancing coordination with the United Nations system in the field would facilitate further progress

41. Capacity requirements (in terms of resources, staff numbers and skill sets) of envoy missions vary with the nature of their mandates and the level of activities necessary to fulfil them at different periods. Of the four envoys reviewed, two have staff dedicated solely to their support, while the other two rely on desk officers in the regional divisions.[32] During periods of high mission activity, staff capacity appears overstretched. Some envoy missions have had to borrow staff from peacekeeping missions, multilateral organizations (such as the European Union, World Bank and International Monetary Fund) and Governments. In other cases, mission staff must fulfil several roles concurrently just to keep up with the political process, sometimes causing considerable personal strain.[33] In situations where desk officers function as de facto mission staff, the demands made on them during periods of high activity are reportedly overwhelming given their ongoing regional responsibilities.[34] The lack of appropriate staff skills in mediation can also be detrimental. In one envoy mission, United Nations staff observed that a lack of trained mediation experts was a contributing factor to that mission not achieving its objectives.

42. By building more productive partnerships with the United Nations system, envoys could significantly leverage their influence and contribute to a more coherent and cohesive United Nations. Despite the Secretary-General's note of guidance on relations between Representatives of the Secretary-General, Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators, of 30 October 2000, there is little interaction between envoys and the relevant United Nations country teams. While recognizing that the mandate limitations of some agencies preclude their involvement in political affairs, OIOS acknowledges that the emphasis towards "one United Nations" provides an impetus for greater integration which could draw on the comparative advantages of the different actors. Country teams will have

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[31] "Friends of the Secretary-General" (more commonly known as Groups of Friends) is an informal instrument used to leverage the influence of the Secretary-General and enhance the United Nations resources in mediation and peacemaking processes by drawing on the diplomatic, intellectual, and financial influence of powerful, interested actors.

[32] The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) has one political affairs officer located outside the Department. The office of Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide is also located outside the Secretariat and staffed by two Professionals and one General Service staff.

[33] Based on Department and envoy mission staff interviews, staff in two special political missions reportedly covered many activities in addition to those specified in their job descriptions owing to insufficient staff posts.

[34] One desk officer reports having worked regularly until midnight during the initial period following the envoy's appointment, providing substantive and logistical support.

responsibility for delivering on the dividends of any agreements mediated, and their input at the negotiation stage will facilitate this.

43. The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide presents a unique case of envoy partnerships. Fulfilment of its mandate necessitates a two-way flow of information and analysis with Secretariat partners, and engagement with various Secretariat policy forums. By definition, given its prevention mandate, the Office requires information from other United Nations bodies on situations of potential wide-scale human rights violations before they have escalated. These requests tend not to be prioritized, however, because the Office is geographically and administratively separate from the Secretariat with no one department responsible for its support. Furthermore, information has only been forthcoming when requested, since the Office is not included in regular information dissemination systems of the Secretariat.

D. Management and other support systems for envoys are inadequate and do not ensure transparency and accountability

44. The proliferation of envoys over the past 10 years is mirrored in the ad hoc nature of their support systems, which are highly dependent on the individuals concerned (see A/61/357, para. 54). In part, the rationale for this variety of support structures lies in the history of the missions and may not represent the optimal support structure to achieve envoy objectives, and in part it reflects a modus operandi within the Department that is reactive, leaving little time or opportunity for strategic thinking on how to maximize their effectiveness, management and support. Of the 15 additional posts requested by the Department for the biennium 2006-2007, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions recommended approval of only 6 posts to strengthen the Department's mediation capacity and to enhance substantive support of envoys (see A/60/7/Add.13 and Corr.1 and 2, paras. 32-33).

45. The existing Department of Political Affairs Desk Officer Handbook (which none of the desk officers interviewed was aware of, and which contains no guidance on support or management of special political missions) is currently being updated by the Policy and Planning Unit and the Office of the Under-Secretary-General (see A/61/357, para. 77 (recommendation 10)). Desk officers will be consulted during this process. This is a positive development, but it remains to be seen whether this process will catalyse strategic thinking and systematize envoy management and support.

46. Envoy appointments are made by the Secretary-General. There are no published criteria defining the competencies against which envoys are appointed, leading to a perception among some Member States and United Nations staff that the current selection process lacks transparency (see A/59/565, paras. 100-101). As reported in *On Being a Special Representative of the Secretary-General*, several appointees reported that they had no idea why they were chosen;[35] this was also confirmed during interviews with envoys. Given the international standing of envoys, a conventional system of recruitment might not be appropriate. However, a transparent process of appointment, including the identification of desirable skills

[35] See Connie Peck, editor, *On Being a Special Representative of the Secretary-General*, Geneva, United Nations Institute for Training and Research, 2006.

and experience for particular appointments before they are announced, is necessary to secure the buy-in of all parties. Despite United Nations support for a more equitable gender balance, including the number of female envoys, there has never been a female envoy appointed to lead good offices missions (see S/2005/636).

47. The lack of a formal accountability framework for envoys, coupled with inconsistent reporting systems, makes management of envoys challenging. Envoys are accountable to the Secretary-General, and through him to the Security Council, while the Department is responsible for their management and support. While the Under-Secretary-General of the Department is of equal rank to most envoys, the rest of the Department's senior managers and desk officers rank below them, making their oversight and management challenging. In effect, envoys report directly to the Secretary-General, keeping the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Political Affairs (and, where relevant, the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the High Commissioner for Human Rights) informed. However, the Department of Political Affairs is accountable for managing special political mission budgets. The situation is further complicated when the Secretary-General has particular knowledge and interest of an issue or region, resulting in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General serving as the first port of call for those envoy missions rather than the relevant Department of Political Affairs desk officer. This has resulted in an ad hoc pattern of management, with different functions fulfilled by different actors/offices, rather than a coherent management system.

48. Envoys submit biannual reports that are incorporated into the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council and they attend relevant Security Council meetings as requested. The lack of monitoring by the Department effectively leaves envoys to interpret their own mandates. Where reviews of envoys have been carried out, these have been commissioned at the envoy's own initiative.[36] *The Department of Political Affairs states that Member States, through the relevant agenda items at the Security Council and the General Assembly, have adequate opportunity to opine on the work of the Secretariat, and their views are well documented through resolutions ... and other means.*

49. In response to Member States' requests, Department budget submissions now include objectives, expected achievements, indicators and expected outputs for each special political mission to justify the requested allocation.[37] However, while these represent an encouraging move towards a more results-based framework, the expected accomplishments and indicators do not sufficiently reflect the reality of situations, nor are the outcomes under the direct control of the envoy or the Department. While OIOS acknowledges the Department's concern that there are significant challenges in assessing performance, as well as in translating Security Council mandates into operational performance indicators, further refinement of the results-based framework could contribute to a more systematic and comparative review of envoys, enabling the documentation of lessons learned and best practices to inform future missions.

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[36] The Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide commissioned a review after the office's first year of operation.

[37] See A/60/585/Add.1 and 2 and statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China by Ms. Karen Lock, Permanent Mission of the Republic of South Africa to the United Nations, on agenda item 124 at the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly, 21 March 2006 (A/C.5/60/SR.41).

50. The substance and comprehensiveness of briefings given to envoys by the Department, when and if they occur, depend largely on the desk officer and on the initiative of the envoys themselves.[38] While some envoys have voiced their appreciation for briefing materials provided by the desk officers, the lack of consistent briefing guidelines and regular briefings is an obvious gap in the envoys' induction process. Very different understandings of the time commitments envisaged for their roles have been reported between the Secretariat and envoys, and on occasion, only following their appointments have envoys been apprised of the details of conflicts for which they have become responsible for helping find a solution.[39] Given that envoys with no prior experience of the United Nations are regularly appointed, briefings should cover the workings of the organization, including normative frameworks.

51. Current administrative and budgetary rules and procedures, which were never designed to support envoy missions, hinder and constrain substantive work. When envoys are actively involved in negotiations, increased support demands are made of the Department's regional divisions and the Executive Office. To respond to a constantly changing dynamic among the parties, and to take advantage of emerging opportunities, missions require an administrative dynamism matching the dynamism of mission staff. Systems and personnel are needed who understand the requirement for flexibility to facilitate speedy decision-making and who are sufficiently familiar with United Nation's procedures to expedite matters quickly.[40]

52. During 2006, a Mediation Support Unit was established in Policy and Planning Unit as envisioned in the report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (see A/59/565, para. 103). Currently funded by donor seed money, the Mediation Support Unit aims to build capacity and provide a resource for United Nations and non-United Nations mediators by establishing a comprehensive knowledge base on mediation.[41] The Mediation Support Unit is planning further development of the *UN Peacemaker* website, however, capacity limitations are resulting in slow progress.

53. There is no general knowledge management mechanism to facilitate systematic review, capture and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned, and that could serve as a repository of institutional memory for the Department and future envoys. Additionally, there is no clear policy requiring an end of mission report from retiring envoys which could also provide institutional memory.[42] There is a need to develop systems to capture information on the planning and management of envoy missions as a knowledge base for incoming envoys and for the wider Secretariat.

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[38] Connie Peck, editor, op. cit., pp. 36-43.

[39] Reportedly one envoy was apprised of the situation on the ground only after accepting the post, when visiting the previous envoy. All he received during his official induction was a copy of the Secretary-General's letter to the President of the Security Council informing him of the appointment.

[40] One envoy mission staff member commented that requests for authorization for a variety of matters, from equipping the office to booking urgent flights, sometimes went unanswered for days.

[41] Regional consultations are currently under way to capture wisdom from experienced mediators appropriate to different regions.

[42] Department staff disagree on whether reports were required.

V. Conclusion

54. While the political context influences the effectiveness of expert groups and envoys, there is a convergence of opinion among Member States, expert groups, envoys and Secretariat staff that by focusing international attention on their mandated areas, both expert group and envoys are performing a valued function. This appears to be the case even in situations where envoy positions have been left vacant, maintaining some degree of international pressure on the disputing parties. As noted in the *European Journal of International Law*: "It is significant that the least intrusive, least expensive and frequently most successful form of UN peace-making has proven to be the diplomatic role of the Secretary-General [and his envoys], especially when supported by the authority of the Security Council and its permanent members."[43]

55. Despite this generally favourable assessment, the present evaluation highlights areas in which the strategic framework within which expert groups and envoys operate could be clarified and substantive support, as well as of management, could be increased.[44] OIOS makes seven recommendations accordingly. *The Department of Political Affairs states that the report needs to be more forthright in making a case for additional resources, without which any of the recommendations cannot be achieved.*

VI. Recommendations

Recommendation 1

56. **The Department of Political Affairs, in consultation with the Office of Legal Affairs and experts, further strengthen and document common methodological standards and expert group reporting guidelines.** The Department should ensure that all experts and consultants are clear on due process requirements and evidentiary standards, and understand that Office of Legal Affairs support is available for the duration of the mandate.

Recommendation 2

57. **Working with the Department of Political Affairs and the Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of Human Resources Management should take the lead and responsibility to further clarify appropriate terms and conditions under which experts can be recruited, following a systematic assessment of the support needs necessary to facilitate achievement of their mandated activities.**

Recommendation 3

58. **The Secretary-General, in conjunction with the Department of Political Affairs, should initiate a strategic review of the envoy system to ensure a more**

[43] Thomas M. Frank, "The Secretary-General's Role in Conflict Resolution: Past, Present and Pure Conjecture", *The European Journal of International Law*, vol. 6, No. 3 (1995).

[44] Evaluation findings pertaining to envoys resonate strongly with the findings and recommendations of an informal paper, "CRD Support to Special Envoys", prepared by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The Office endorses the need for a wider review of the role and terms of engagement of envoys to the United Nations system.

strategic and focused utilization of envoys in the future. OIOS suggests that the following issues be included in the review: (a) the range of issues envoys could and should address; (b) an assessment of their added value; (c) clarification of the rationale for their appointments; (d) the setting of clear objectives; (e) development of a clear accountability and operational framework; and (f) provision of adequate human and financial resources for their support.

Recommendation 4

59. **Based on the results of the review in recommendation 3, the Department of Political Affairs, in consultation with envoys, should strengthen current management and support systems to make them more consistent and coherent.** OIOS considers that the following issues must be addressed:

(a) **Selection.** The Department should develop competency-based criteria for envoy appointments, including diplomatic skills, availability of personal networks, good contextual understanding, cultural sensitivity, knowledge of relevant United Nations norms and standards, and perceived impartiality by interested parties;

(b) **Briefing.** Systematic briefings should be instituted for envoys, including presentation of the international norms and standards developed and upheld by the United Nations as they pertain to envoys;

(c) **Substantive and administrative support.** The Department should consult with past and present envoys on their administrative support, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of support needs and developing systems that maximize flexibility and responsive decision-making. An evaluation should be made of the resources necessary to meet these needs;

(d) **Reporting lines/procedures.** There is a need to clarify and standardize reporting lines and procedures between envoys, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the Department;

(e) **Accountability.** The expected accomplishments and indicators the Department develops for envoy missions should be reviewed and redeveloped to reflect more closely realities on the ground, and specifically those measures that are under the control of envoys.

Recommendation 5

60. **The Department of Political Affairs, in consultation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Development Group, should consider how to enhance coordination between expert groups, envoys, peacekeeping missions and country teams, in order to strengthen the work of the United Nations in the field.** These entities should develop guidelines for how expert groups and envoys work with field-based agencies, and the guidelines should be included in expert group and envoy briefings.

Recommendation 6

61. **The Department of Political Affairs should develop knowledge management systems to capture and disseminate expert group and envoy knowledge and to promote learning and best practices.** These knowledge systems should be available to the Secretariat and, where appropriate, Member States:

(a) For expert groups, this system should build on existing databases and tracking instruments as well as the current Member State proposal, and should include protocols for information storage, access and security;

(b) For envoys, routine debriefings should be instituted to capture knowledge to complement the existing mediation support unit database. Information captured should be available to incoming envoys as part of their briefing.

Recommendation 7

62. As an advocate of women's rights and gender equality, the United Nations must act on this commitment by engaging more women in high-level mediation and peacemaking:

(a) **The Secretary-General should give more serious, creative and strategic consideration to appointing women as envoys;**

(b) **the Department of Political Affairs should make a determined effort to increase the number of females in expert groups.**

(*Signed*) Inga-Britt **Ahlenius**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services